

Part 5. Emergency situations



Reacting to driving problems

Ignition (starter) interlock system

Today's vehicles are equipped with ignition inlock systems that, when used properly, will prevent the theft of an automobile and vehicle rollaway. The U.S. Department of Transportation has passed standards for these systems.

USDOT amended the standard for motor vehicle theft protection and vehicle rollaway, specifically those driving or riding in vehicles with automatic transmissions. This rule provided for greater flexibility in designing key-locking and transmission shift locking systems. It permits key removal only when the vehicle's transmission is in the "Park" position.

Drivers in an emergency situation on the highway may attempt to turn off the vehicle while it is still in motion, believing they will bring the vehicle to a stop. The basic rule the driver must follow when operating a vehicle with a steering wheel interlock system is: **never turn the ignition to the lock position while the vehicle is in motion.** Your steering will lock as you turn, and you'll lose control of the vehicle.

Skids

Sudden turns, lane changes or hard braking can throw you into a skid. (This happens often on wet or icy roads.) You handle a skid in both front-wheel drive vehicles and rear-wheel drive vehicles the same. If the rear end of your car starts to slide, take your foot off the gas pedal at once. Do not make a fast turn away from the direction of the skid. That will cause a spin. Turn in the direction the rear of your car is skidding.

Be careful not to over-steer. You will be able to feel when the car is back under control. Then straighten the wheels.

Try not to use your brakes during a side skid.

Emergency stops

If you must stop on a highway for an emergency, there are some points to keep in mind. On a highway with paved shoulders, signal and turn onto the shoulder at or near traffic speed. Then slow down. Where the shoulder is unpaved, signal a turn and slow down to a safe speed before turning off.

Turn on the parking lights (or emergency warning lights, if you have them) in dusk, darkness or bad weather.

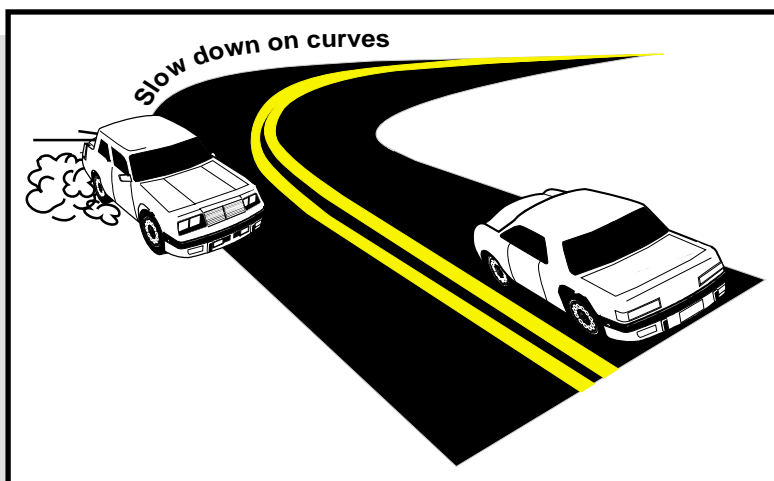
Do not block taillights at night by standing or working behind the car. Day or night, put a flare or other warning sign just behind the car. Put another warning device at least 300 feet back (about 120 paces). Raise the hood. Tie a white handkerchief to the antenna or left door handle as a signal if you need help.

Running off the pavement

If your wheels drift onto the shoulder of the road, do not try to turn back onto the pavement right away. This might throw your car off balance. Instead, stay on the shoulder and ease up on the gas pedal. After you have slowed down, turn back onto the road.

If you run off the pavement:

- slow down
- regain control
- turn slowly onto the road.



Car fires

Most car fires are caused by short circuits in the electrical system. In case of fire, do not waste time. Get passengers out and away from the vehicle at once. If you do not carry a fire extinguisher, try to smother burning wires with any heavy cloth, dirt or sand. Do not use water to put out an electrical fire. Do not grip burning wires with your bare hands. An electrical burn can be serious. If the fire is beyond your control, get away from the car before the gas tank explodes. Flag for help.

Plunging into water

Water causes more panic than any other emergency. A few tips have grown out of actual tests. A car with windows and doors closed will float from 3 to 10 minutes. Two major points in escape and self rescue from a submerged vehicle are: to wear a seat belt, which will increase your chances of surviving the initial impact of the water; and to escape from the vehicle while it is still floating on the surface through an open window *before* the water reaches the window level. It is hard to open a door against water pressure, but a window can be rolled down easily. Power windows may short out, so try to open them at once. Glass in the side and rear windows can be broken only with a heavy, hard object.

A front-engine car will sink nose first. Some air may be pushed to the rear, near the roof. When the pressure inside and outside the car is equal, it is easier to open a door. If you cannot get out through a window, try opening a door. Remember that three to five minutes gives you plenty of time in an emergency. If you are not knocked out (and do not panic), there can be enough time to escape. Wearing a seat belt system is the best insurance against being knocked unconscious. So always wear your seat belt.

Stalling on railroad tracks

If you have a standard shift, try to move the car by running the starter in low or second gear. If you have an automatic shift, you will have to push the car off the tracks.

If you cannot get the car off the tracks, and a train is coming, get out. Walk quickly alongside the tracks toward the oncoming train. If your car is hit by a train, anything loose will tend to fly in the direction the train is moving.



No matter how well you take care of your car, there is still a chance of car failure. This section covers what to do if you have the most common car failures when driving.

Brake failure

If your conventional disc and drum brakes suddenly fail, shift to a lower gear and pump the brake pedal fast and hard several times. This may build up enough brake pressure to stop the car. If that does not work, use the parking

brake. But hold the brake release so you can let up if the rear wheels lock and you begin to skid. With the car in low gear, begin looking for a place to stop. Make sure the car is off the roadway. After the car has stopped, call for help. Do not try to drive the car to a garage.

Tire blowout

If you have a flat tire or blowout, hold the steering wheel firmly and keep the car going straight. Slow down gradually. Take your foot off the gas pedal, but do not apply the brakes. Let the car slow down on its own. Then pull off the road and apply the brakes when the car is almost stopped.

Power steering failure

If the engine dies, keep a firm grip on the steering wheel. You will need extra hand power to turn or keep control. Stop the car. You will have to push very hard on power brakes that are not working. Restart the engine if you can. If power steering or brakes do not work, get help.

Headlight failure

If your headlights suddenly go out, safely stop the car. Try the dimmer switch. That will often put them on again. Try the headlight switch a few times. If that doesn't work, put on the parking lights, emergency flashers or turn signals. Pull off the road as soon as possible and leave emergency lights on.

Gas pedal problems

If your gas pedal sticks, keep your eyes on the road. Quickly shift to neutral. Pull off the road as soon as you can. As you bring your car to a stop, turn off the engine.

Hood latch failure

If your hood suddenly flies up, slow down. Try to look under the hood to see the road. If you cannot, put your head out the window and look around the hood. Use the center line or lane marking as a guide. Brake and pull off the road as soon as you can.

Windshield wiper failure

If your windshield wipers stop suddenly during rain or snow, slow down. Roll down your side window and put your head out so that you can see ahead. Brake and pull off the road.



Avoiding collisions

While you should always drive safely, emergencies do arise. If, all of a sudden, you see that your car may hit something, there are three things you can do: stop, turn or speed up.

To stop quickly. If you have conventional disc and drum brakes, pump your brakes to gain better control in steering. You will lock your wheels and cause skidding if you brake hard and hold.

However, if you have antilock brakes (ABS), they will adjust automatically if a wheel begins to lock. With this brake system, you can put maximum pressure on them and retain steering control without pumping the brakes.

To turn quickly. If you feel you can not stop in time, turn away. Run off the road if you have to. If you can keep from using the brakes while turning, this will lessen the chances of a skid. If you turn onto a soft shoulder of a road, do not brake hard. This could cause skidding or loss of control.

To speed up. Sometimes it is best or necessary to speed up to avoid a collision. This may happen when another vehicle is about to hit you from the side or from behind and there is room to the front to get out of danger. Push the gas pedal to the floor. You may have only seconds to act, so decide quickly. Be sure to slow down once the danger has passed.

Last minute choices

In the few seconds you have before a possible collision, try not to panic. There are some last minute choices you have to make. Study the following paragraph. It will help you be aware of what to do in an emergency. Reacting properly and quickly can avoid collisions or, at least, minimize damage.

If a collision looks possible, turn away from oncoming traffic even if it means leaving the road. Drive (rather than skid) off the road. This gives you more control. Choose to hit something that will give way (such as brush or shrubs) rather than something hard. Choose to hit something going your way rather than something that is not moving. Choose to hit something not moving rather than something moving toward you. If you have to hit anything, try to make it a glancing blow. A sideswipe, for example, will help you slow down. Try never to hit anything head-on.

Protecting yourself in collisions

You may not always be able to avoid a collision. If your car is about to be hit, this section gives some tips on how to protect yourself. Above all, always wear your seat belt system.

Rear collision

If you are about to be hit from the rear, be ready to apply your brakes. Try to keep from being pushed into a car ahead. Brace yourself between the steering wheel and the seat back. Press the back of your head firmly against the head rest (if your car has one).

Side collision

If you are about to be hit from the side, keep a tight grip on the steering wheel. This may keep you from being thrown against the side of the car. Get ready to turn fast so that if you spin around you can try to control the car.

Head-on collision

If you are about to be hit from the front, use your arms and hands to protect your face if you are wearing a shoulder strap. If you are not using a shoulder strap, throw yourself across the seat to keep from hitting the steering wheel or windshield.

What to do in case of an accident

If you are involved or see an accident happen, the first thing to do is stop. The second is to assume the worst and get help. Wait at the scene, but try not to block traffic. Try to stay calm and ask assistance from passing motorists, bikers or joggers if needed. Notify the police; call an ambulance. Depending on the location of the accident — local road, highway or in a busy city intersection — warn oncoming traffic. Follow the first aid tips below to assist injured persons and complete the accident reporting form in the back of this manual while on the scene.

Reporting accidents

New Jersey law requires that you notify the police of accidents where there is injury, death, or car or property damage. If someone has been killed, do not move the body or permit anyone to move the body until the police or ambulance arrive.

Note: Use the form in the back of this manual to take notes in case of accidents. Keep this manual in your car.

If you are involved, you can help the police by answering as many questions, and by giving them as many facts about the accident as you can. When damage to property is more than \$500, or there is personal injury, you must:

- send a written report to Motor Vehicles within 10 days if no police report is filed. A written report is not required if a report is filed by police. You can get a report form from the police.
- notify your own insurance company at once. Give complete information about the accident. See a doctor as soon as you can if you are shaken up.

If you are not trained in first aid, remember that there are only a few things you can do:

- send for help;
- try to help the injured where they lie in order of their needs. Keep them warm;
- to stop bleeding, put any clean cloth over the wound;
- give first aid if you know how, if a person has stopped breathing;
- do not move the injured unless there is danger from traffic or fire as movement could cause more injury;
- ask the walking injured person to sit or lie down flat on his back. If the person is bleeding from the lower part of the face and jaw, turn him/her on his/her side. Do not give fluids or alcohol;

- do not try to take an injured person to the hospital yourself unless there is no way to get help. With serious injuries, improper movement may be harmful.

Parked car accidents

If you hit a parked car or other vehicle, notify the police. Try to find the owner. If you cannot do so, leave a note where it can be seen on the car. The note should include your name, address, and driver license number.



Auto repair facilities

When you've had an accident and your vehicle needs repair, consider only auto repair facilities that are properly licensed to remove, rebuild or install integral component parts of an engine, powertrain, chassis or body of an automobile damaged in a collision.

Before you decide on an auto body shop:

- check out several shops.
- call MVS to verify licensing.
- check for the equipment that the shop needs to properly repair your car (frame machine, mig welder, paint room).
- ask if the shop is a member of the local Chamber of Commerce or a collision repair association. (You may want to call one of these groups to verify the shop's reputation.)
- ask about assistance with your insurance claim. Watch out here — it's illegal for a shop to save your insurance deductible. Insurance fraud violators are subject to a penalty of not more than \$5,000 for a first offense, \$10,000 for a second offense and \$15,000 for a third offense. (For more information about insurance fraud, see p. 108).
- request an estimate in writing before you authorize repairs. And, a written warranty on the work that will be done. The estimate should contain the agreed-upon payment terms and the repair completion date and if authorized equipment will be used.

Motor Vehicle Services has an established system for licensing all New Jersey's body shops. If you don't see a license displayed, or if you have doubts about the shop, call (609) 984-9633.